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OF THE AMERICAN VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION



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Economic Note

Employment, starting salaries, and educational indebtedness of 1989 graduates of US veterinary medical colleges

In cooperation with US colleges of veterinary medicine, the AVMA conducted its annual survey of the graduating classes of veterinary medicine in spring 1989. The primary purpose of the survey was to secure data on veterinary graduates' employment, salaries, and educational

ceived 3 or more offers. At the time of the survey, 66% of the graduates had accepted positions for employment upon graduation.

Regarding the graduates who had accepted employment, 78% had accepted positions as employees in private practice

years (Table 1). Specifically, 39.1% entered small animal exclusive practice at a mean annual salary of \$24,834, up 5.4% from 1988; 9.1% entered small animal predominant practice at a mean annual salary of \$23,736, up 5.0% from 1988. Also, 11.8% entered mixed animal practice

Table 1—Types of employment and starting incomes of a large sample of 1989 US veterinary medical college graduates

	Percentage of graduates	Mean starting salary (No.)	Mean additional compensation expected in 1st year (No.)
Large animal exclusive	2.3	\$25,210 (20)	\$7,308 (12)
Large animal predominant	10.7	\$26,663 (82)	\$3,908 (64)
Mixed animal	11.8	\$23,961 (96)	\$3,488 (56)
Small animal predominant	9.1	\$23,736 (64)	\$3,248 (46)
Small animal exclusive	39.1	\$24,834 (313)	\$2,722 (201)
Equine predominant	4.8	\$23,270 (38)	\$6,456 (23)
University	1.3	\$15,320 (11)	\$1,250 (2)
Federal government*	0.8	\$23,301 (5)	\$1,000 (1)
Military service†	1.0	\$31,275 (8)	\$6,000 (1)
State/local government	0.1	\$26,500 (1)	
Industry/commercial	0.4	\$29,000 (4)	\$3,500 (2)
Advanced study	15.2	\$16,363 (109)	\$3,096 (26)
Self-employed	3.0	\$26,000 (13)	\$5,390 (10)
Other	0.5	\$25,637 (4)	\$2,000 (1)
	100 (924)‡	\$23,627 (768)	\$3,565 (445)

*Starting salary for federal government employment of veterinarians with no experience, no advanced degree other than the DVM, and not in the top 25% of their class was \$23,846 (GS 9, step 1). †Starting salary for military employment for veterinarians who are single, with no prior military service, including base pay, subsistence and quarters allowance, and veterinary special pay was \$28,290. ‡Of the 924 graduates reporting employment, 768 graduates reported their annual starting salary for full-time employment.

indebtedness. Of the 2,148 US graduates, 1,398 responded to the survey, a response rate of 65%.

Employment and income

At the time of the survey, 82% of the responding graduates had received at least one employment offer. Of those graduates receiving offers, 34% had received 1 offer, 26% had received 2 offers, and 40% had re-

(Table 1). Mean starting salaries were reported for 768 graduates who indicated annual starting salaries for full-time employment. For graduates taking positions as employees in private practice, the average starting salary was \$24,742. This represents a 7.2% increase over the 1988 starting salary of \$23,079 for private practice employees.¹

The 1989 graduates chose employment in a variety of sectors of the veterinary medical industry, though the majority chose private practice as in past

Table 2—Distribution of 1989 US veterinary medical college graduates entering private practice according to starting salary*

Annual starting salary (\$)	Relative frequency (%)	Cumulative frequency (%)
Less than 15,000	2.0	100.0
15,001 to 19,000	2.9	98.0
19,001 to 23,000	25.9	95.1
23,001 to 27,000	45.0	69.2
27,001 to 31,000	20.1	24.2
More than 31,000	4.1	4.1

*Total respondents = 613. †Cumulative frequency percentages represent the percentage of graduates with annual starting salaries in excess of the corresponding next lowest salary interval; eg, 24.2% of the graduates reported salaries in excess of \$27,000.

Prepared by J. Karl Wise, PhD, Wisemark Associates, PO Box 681189, Schaumburg, IL 60168-1189.

Table 3—Percentage distribution of 1989 starting salaries of 768 US veterinary medical college graduates, by type of employment

Starting salary (\$)	LAE	LAP	MA	SAP	SAE	EP	U	FG	MS	SLG	IC	AS	SE	Other
Less than 15,000	5.0	1.2	1.0	1.6	1.6	7.9	45.5	20.0	...	...	...	42.2	7.7	...
15,000 to 19,000	5.0	1.2	3.1	4.7	2.2	7.9	54.5	...	...	...	...	42.2	7.7	25.0
19,001 to 23,000	15.0	13.4	34.4	39.1	26.2	13.2	...	...	12.5	...	25.0	11.9	7.7	...
23,001 to 27,000	40.0	34.1	42.7	39.1	48.6	57.9	...	20.0	...	100.0	25.0	3.7	46.2	25.0
27,001 to 31,000	25.0	43.9	17.7	14.1	16.9	7.9	...	60.0	50.0	...	25.0	...	15.4	50.0
More than 31,000	10.0	6.1	1.0	1.6	4.5	5.3	...	...	37.5	...	25.0	...	15.4	...
No. of respondents	20	82	96	64	313	38	11	5	8	1	4	109	13	4

LAE = Large animal exclusive; LAP = Large animal predominant; MA = Mixed animal; SAP = Small animal predominant; SAE = Small animal exclusive; EP = Equine predominant; U = University; FG = Federal government; MS = Military Service; SLG = State/local government; IC = Industrial/commercial; AS = Advanced study; SE = Self-employed.

Table 4—Educational debt of 1989 US veterinary medical college graduates*

Debt (\$)	Relative frequency (%)	Cumulative frequency† (%)
0	17.6	100.0
1 to 5,000	6.0	82.2
5,001 to 10,000	7.1	76.4
10,001 to 15,000	5.9	69.3
15,001 to 20,000	9.9	63.4
20,001 to 25,000	10.7	53.5
25,001 to 30,000	13.1	42.8
30,001 to 35,000	7.4	29.7
35,001 to 40,000	8.9	22.3
40,001 to 45,000	4.9	13.4
45,001 to 50,000	3.7	8.5
More than 50,000	4.8	4.8

*Total respondents = 1,398. †Cumulative frequency percentages represent the percentage of graduates with debt in excess of the corresponding next lowest debt interval; 63.4% of the graduates reported debt in excess of \$15,000.

at a mean annual salary of \$23,961, up 7.5%. Only 4.8% of graduates entered equine practice, and the mean starting salary was \$23,270, up 9.4%. In the livestock sector, 2.3% and 10.7% of graduates entered large animal exclusive and large animal predominant practice, respectively. In large animal exclusive and large animal predominant practice, mean starting salaries were \$25,210, up 2.9%, and \$26,663, up 14.8%, respectively. An additional 3.0% of the respondents reported that they would be self-employed in private practice, with an expected mean salary of \$26,000.

As in past years, less than

2% of the responding graduates accepted positions with the military service. The mean starting salary was \$31,275. Five respondents indicated employment with the federal government; their mean annual starting salary was \$23,301. One respondent entering state/local government reported a salary of \$26,500. Four graduates entering the industry sector reported a mean starting salary of \$29,000.

In the academic sector, 1.3% took university positions (research or teaching) at a mean salary of \$15,320, and 15.2% would begin advanced study (graduate degree, internship, or residency program) at a mean salary of \$16,363.

The distribution of graduates entering private clinical practice who reported full-time employment salaries shows that 45% will earn between \$23,000 and \$27,000 in their first year of employment (Table 2). Twenty percent will earn between \$27,000 and \$31,000, and 4% will earn more than \$31,000. Stated another way, almost one of four 1989 graduates entering private practice will earn an annual salary greater than \$27,000 in their first full-time position. The percentage distribution across salary intervals is shown for all employment sectors in Table 3.

All graduates were asked if they would receive compensation in addition to their salary in their first year of employment. At least one half of the graduates who reported starting salaries indicated that they would receive additional compensation within the first year (Table 1). Most likely, the additional pay represents a percentage of gross income, a percentage of emergency fees, a bonus, a salary raise, or other financial compensation. Most graduates anticipating additional pay expected amounts ranging from \$3,000 to \$7,000.

Educational debt

All graduates were requested to indicate what their total educational indebtedness would be upon graduation. For the 1,152 graduates (82%) who indicated having educational debt, the mean debt was \$27,726, up 7.7% from 1988. The relative frequency distribution showed that 63% of 1989 graduates, compared with 60% of 1988 graduates, had educational debt in excess of \$15,000 (Table 4).¹

Reference

1. Wise JK. Employment, starting salaries, and educational indebtedness of 1988 graduates of US veterinary medical colleges. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 1988; 193:1317-1318.